MAGAZINE OF THE UNIVERSAL FELLOWSHIP
OF METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY CHURCHES

FEBRUARY 1982

IN UNITY

WORLD CHURCH EXTENSION

About ten years have now passed since inquiries began to be received in the Universal Fellowship offices from persons in countries other than the United States. In 1972 Rev. Elder Troy Perry made a visit to London, England, to a group of Christians who later that year became a feasibility study group. In 1973 a church group was founded in Canada (Toronto, Ontario), and at the clergy conference a board was formed to oversee the work of World Church Extension. The next year saw groups established in Australia and Nigeria.

Today there are MCC groups in nine countries, including the United States. The growth in Canada and Australia has been so rapid that they now form "Districts" of their own, rather than being World Church Extension areas. At the same time, the Spanish speaking church groups, some of which are in the United States, are considered a part of the World Church Extension program.

February is designated World Church Extension month in the Universal Fellowship, and many churches will be receiving special offerings for this program. It is a program that has done an almost unbelievable amount of work on very limited resources. We want to give an overview of what is happening in each part of the world.

ENGLAND

The Church in London, England was chartered in 1973. They have seen a remarkable growth. They are currently in the process of being approved for Charity status (tax-exemption). If approved, they will be the first Gay-related organization in England to attain it. They now own their own building. The London church, Pastored by Rev. Elder Jean White, has become a great center of evangelism. The newly opened offices for World Church Extension are in London. Many visitors from Europe and other parts of the world visit the group in London to learn about MCC and to return to their own countries to share what they have experienced.

There are many other thriving church groups in England. There are six Study Groups, and one Mission, as well as other new groups. The group in Birmingham has bought its own building, and has been granted recognition as "a religious place of worship", which means exemption from local taxes. Following the first ever British Gay Festival recently held in Durham, the Anglican Bishop of Durham has given our Church in Durham free use of the Parrish Hall. This is a great step forward in relations with the Anglican Church.

EUROPE

The only established group meeting in Continental Europe at this time is in Copenhagen, Denmark, led by Rev. Bjorn Marcusson. However, inquiries are received from all parts of Europe. There are groups in the formation stages in Zurich, Switzerland, Germany, Sweden, Norway, and other parts of the continent.

One recent development of interest is contact received from an evangelist who has worked quite sucessfully with another Christian group. He is French, and has worked primarily among Gypsys. He is now moving to Portugal, and plans to

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Guest Editorial

EXTENSION by galen moon

"IF YOU ARE CONVINCED OF WHAT YOU SAY YOU BELIEVE, YOU CAN EXPOSE YOURSELF TO ANYTHING . . . ."

I heard someone say, "We need some of that World Church Extension stuff right here at home!" I agree, but not as was suggested to the exclusion of reaching out to the rest of the world. We are a part of the world, God's World, and extension is every Christian's business; every day, every moment.

Love demonstrated is irresistable! Isn't that the solution to all problems, all questions? Isn't that what Christ instructed us to do? Love thy neighbor as thyself. So, what's the blockage?

It seems obvious that the basic reason we are unable to love others (our neighbors) is that we do not love ourselves, regardless of what we say we believe.

Slander, you say? Well, I guess it depends on how you define love. Acts of selfishness and jealousy are frequently described as acts of love. But the conflict and pain and struggle resulting from those acts toward others certainly do not carry the message of God's Love. They are, however, extension imprints by us on all we contact. They identify each of us in the minds of the ones touched by our "love strokes". Jesus said, "Inasmuch as you have done it unto one of these, you have done it unto Me". But, how can we, in our humanness, extend to others what we have not experienced ourselves? How can we be expected to give to others what we so much need for ourselves? Does it make sense? Not by selfish, human reasoning or Satan's scale of measurement, YES, by God's direction.

Only when viewed in the light of The Creator's eternal law of "plant the seed and reap the harvest" do we begin to understand that love, concern, and sharing are seeds to be planted before we can know joys and securities of companionship, friendship, love and membership in the family of Christ.

So, extension is first of all a personal and individual action: a constant reflection of Divine Love. It comes as a result of much yearning prayer; asking Jesus to take over and be the director/motivator of our actions and our extensions.

Only as much as the space you give to Jesus, will the Holy Spirit be able to effect performance in your life. When you increase, through dedication, the area of your life which God can use for planting seeds of love - - - at home or abroad - - - you find proof of the truth of our Lord's promises.

Extension, individually or congregationally, is an effort to do what Jesus says we must do as members of God's family. It means extending ourselves as channels for the life-giving contact with the Source of Eternal and Loving Life for others, known or unknown to us individually.

Praise God, always!

-- Reprinted by permission from "Wander No More", newsletter of MCC of the Pomona Valley.

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The Reverend Jose Von Buhler, and members of MCC Thames Valley

WORLD CHURCH EXTENSION

Continued from page 1

form a group there and join the Universal Fellowship.

Close contact is maintained with people in every country of Europe, including the "Eastern Bloc", where being Christian is more dangerous than being Gay. Many of the people who call or write live hundreds of miles away from each other, and there just is not an MCC in their area.

AFRICA

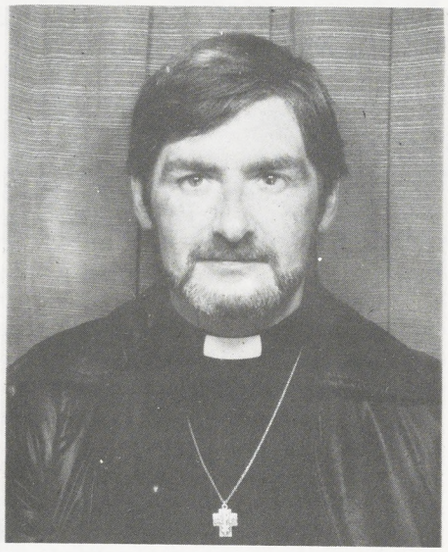
In 1974 a group of churches in the Nigerian state of Imo joined the Universal Fellowship. They are led by Rev. Sylvanus Maduka. Their interest was prompted by mention of MCC, in less than flattering terms, in publications of the Watchtower Society. The largest group, in Zaria, was chartered in 1976.

Following a visit last year by Rev. Elder Jean White and Rev. Elder Charlie Arehart, the churches there have been greatly encouraged and are reporting progress. Rev. Maduka has purchased public address equipment, and is holding outdoor meetings, which have been a success.

There are also MCC groups established in another African country, but we cannot mention their location due to the extremely repressive nature of the government there. Nevertheless, those faithful people remain in the daily prayers and thoughts of all MCC members and friends around the world.

ASIA AND SOUTH PACIFIC

Rev. Elder White reports that many inquiries are being received from Asian countries and Pacific Island nations, such as Japan, Burma, Malaysia, etc. Again, these people are often widely separated, but they often do read English, so we are able to maintain communication with them. (See the interview with Rev. Elder White in this issue for a discussion of the need for translators.)



The Reverend Jo McVay-Abbott, Worship Coordinator, MCC Birmingham

In March, 1982, Los Angeles will be visited by a young man from Burma who will attend Samaritan Theological Institute and visit churches in that area. He leads two groups of thirty people in Burma who will be joining MCC. To them we say a hearty "Welcome to our family"!

Another group in this region of the world is in Auckland, New Zealand. The Worship Coordinator is Leigh Neighbour. The group is involved in outreach to other areas of New Zealand.

Leigh Neighbour, Worship Coordinator, MCC Auckland

HISPANIC AMERICAS

Rev. Jose Mojica is the Director of Ministerio Hispano De Las Americas, the World Church Extension outreach to Spanish speaking people in North and South America.

The big new in this program is the group in Mexico City which became a study group in August 1981. The Worship Coordinator is Rev. Panucio Ruiz, Assistant Pastor of the largest Methodist church in that city. Fifteen people became members during Rev. Mojica's visit in October, 1981. The group reports continued growth and enthusiasm. We will be bringing you reports of their progress in the months to come.

There are three Spanish speaking congregations in the United States in New York (Hispana MCC), Los Angeles (Latina MCC), and Santa Cruz, AZ. There are also groups meeting in New Jersey and Monterrey, Mexico. Contacts are being maintained in other countries.

AUSTRALIA AND CANADA

As mentioned earlier in the article, Australia and Canada are no longer considered World Church Extension areas, since their rapid growth has enabled them to attain "District" status. However, their growth shows what has been happening in the work of World Church Extension. There are seven Churches in Canada, and four in Australia. Space does not allow us to give a complete report of the progress of these groups. Look for further news in upcoming issues.

Rev. Elder Jean White says, "The goal of World Church Extension is to form new church groups in areas where beginning a new group is made difficult by reason of geographical distance from the other groups in the Fellowship, or because of language barriers. This includes the United States, as well as other countries.

"It is important that each new group be made to feel a part of the Fellowship as a whole, and that they realize that each MCC group had its struggles in the beginning.

"We are seeing a tremendous growth in every part of the World. Our only limitations are people willing to lead new groups, and the resources needed to support them. But we are finding leaders around the world, and we are sending leaders to other countries to help get groups off the ground.

"The next few years will be years of tremendous growth for our Fellowship around the World."

WORLD CHURCH EXTENSION

What It Is, And What It's Doing

An Interview With The Rev. Elder Jean White

IU: Elder White, for those of our readers who may not know you well, what was your experience in coming to UFMCC?

White: Well, I was previously a missionary with another religious group, but I had returned home to England realizing that I was lesbian and Christian, and I had to deal with that. Then in 1972 I was asked to attend a meeting of a group called "Fellowship of Christ the Liberator". They had invited Rev. Elder Troy Perry to visit and speak to them, and this was my first meeting. I later joined that group, which became a feasibility study group, and I have been a member ever since. I was a deacon and student clergy. I was licensed as clergy in 1978.

IU: When did you become Secretary of World Church Extension?

White: I was elected to the Board of Elders at the Los Angeles General Conference in 1979. That same year, the Board of Elders elected me Secretary of World Church Extension.

IU: What has happened during that time?

White: Well, so much has happened, and yet at times it seems that so little has happened.

One of the greatest things to happen was the trip that I took with Rev. Elder Arehart to our churches in Nigeria. This was a great chance to see what our people are doing there. I feel that it gave them a great boost to know that there were Christian brothers and sisters from other countries who really did care about what happened to them. They have had so little contact with the Fellowship as a whole. I believe it really encouraged them in the work they are doing there.

Another great development is that we now have a World Church Extension office in London. This has been funded by the General Conference and has been open since September, 1981. I am now working full time in this office. This gives us a place where people can come to talk to us and work with us. This has also given me more freedom to travel and visit people who have contacted us showing an interest in MCC.

For instance, I have been invited, and visited Sweden and Norway. These were Christian people who had heard about MCC and wanted to speak with us about it. I have other trips to continental Europe planned in the next year to follow-up with the large number of contacts and inquiries we have in many of those countries.

To show you what sort of inquiries we receive, we have recently received a large number of letters from Germany. It seems that a documentary about MCC was aired on German television. We did not know that this was going to happen. As best I can tell, it was a documentary that was filmed in Los Angeles several years ago. At any rate, we began to get a great number of letters requesting information about the nearest MCC group. Dennis Tracy, from the Detroit church, now lives in Germany, and is following up on some of the contacts. I will be traveling there in April to do some further work with this.

IU: Do we receive inquiries from other parts of the world?

White: Oh, yes, a great many! We receive inquiries from every part of the world. We have been getting a great many lately from Asia and the Pacific Islands. We have gotten several from Japan. We have found that many people in that part of the world speak English as a second language. This means we can at least correspond with them and send them some reading material.

One of the greatest problems about the inquiries we get is that most of them are simply wanting to know if there is a group meeting near them. They want to attend and participate, but they are not interested in actually starting a group. What we need are people with leadership abilities, who are familiar with the Fellowship, who can go into some of these areas and become Pastors or Worship Coordinators.

We are getting a great number of contacts throughout Europe. Last year I attended a conference in Italy of the "International Gay Association". We have a lot of contacts in Italy. We have contacts throughout the Eastern bloc of nations, but the situation there is changing so rapidly that it is difficult to say what will happen. We had been keeping in touch with some men in Poland, but have not been able to reach them by phone or letter for two months now. Some of our contacts in Communist countries tell us that it is more sensitive to be Christian in their countries than it is to be gay.

Ninety percent of our contacts in Europe are from people of "liturgical" backgrounds. This is due to the number of State religions there. However, the people are not necessarily attending Church. In fact, the figures show that less than five percent of the people in some European countries actually attend church. Therefore, many of our contacts just do not feel that they have the experience in church work to establish and lead a new group.

Rev. Elder Jean White, Rev. Bjorn Marcusson and members of MCC London and MCC Copenhagen.

IU: What is the greatest need in World Church Extension right now?

White: Translators and Pastors! We cannot establish churches in many countries simply because we cannot supply material in their language. We are doing what we can. We already have some material in French and we have some things being done in Swedish, Norwegian, and Spanish. This is a long and expensive process, as the material not only has to be translated, but then typset and printed.

This has been a continual problem in Nigeria, where there are many different dialects in the same country. Rev. Maduka has to use an interpreter in many areas.

We are trying to preach an inclusive gospel to the entire world, but I sometimes feel we are not getting our whole message across because of language barriers.

We also need more leaders and Pastors, and many of our people in MCC are English speaking. However, I think that if people go into other countries with the understanding that they are going into a different culture, and they are willing to learn rather than judge, I believe they can do a great deal of good in establishing new groups.

There are a number of people right now who are doing a great deal in working with new groups. A young man from the Sacramento church has returned to his native Switzerland and has made many contacts. In fact, there will be a conference in Zurich in March of these people, and I plan to attend. This is a very exciting development.

Another recent development is that a young man from Burma will be traveling to Los Angeles in March to attend STI for one month. He has two groups of thirty people who want to join MCC. He plans to visit a number of churches in the Los Angeles area, and we feel that he will return to Burma with a good understanding of what UFMCC is all about. He will be paying his own airfare, but we have helped to arrange housing and sponsorship for the term of his visit.

I believe we are doing the best we can with the people and resources we have available. But there is so much more to do. We are limited, as I have already said, by the number of people we have to lead and work with new groups, and the lack of available financial support to help and send leaders to areas where people are expressing an interest. Perhaps some of our larger churches can help to support people with training and experience to go to another country and establish new groups. Everyone can help us pray that this will happen.

IU: What do you see in the future for World Church Extension?

White: We are preaching an inclusive gospel to the entire world. This is the gospel message that all people who turn to Christ will be accepted and made a part of God's family.

In the future, I believe this message will be heard by more and more people, and the response will be overwhelming. I don't believe any of us can accurately foresee how many people will be joining us, or how rapid the growth will be in the next few years. We are working together with God, and the "harvest" will indeed be plentiful.

A THANK YOU FROM NEW ZEALAND

Having arrived back in New Zealand from a six week vacation in the United States, my second trip in two years, I would like to express my appreciation to those MCC Churches and members who gave me a warm welcome and who provided accomodation and looked after me by taking me out and introducing me to the communities. I felt in many cases slightly embarrassed by the hospitality given, but very grateful. The kindness given to me made for a very memorable vacation.

I would like to thank a number of people personally. From my 1980 trip, John Laskaris of Los Angeles, Rev. Roger Webb, Jon, Jim and Wayne of Santa Barbara and Peter Hill of San Francisco. From my 1981 trip, Rev. Marge Ragona, Sheila, John and Jim from Boston; Dan and David from Washington; David Story and Bruce Lovejoy of New Orleans.

My only disappointment was that approximately eight MCC Churches which I had hoped to visit did not answer my letters of introduction. Some churches were written to twice. It would have been very helpful in the planning of my trip if an acknowledgement of my letters had been received, even if they were unable to help. Traveling such a long way to a strange city without a contact can sometimes be lonely.

I would like to visit the States again, and would like to hear from anyone who would like to write to me. I can promise all letters will be answered. If anyone is thinking of visiting this beautiful country (New Zealand) and requires touring information or help with accomodations, please write to me at: 25 Tauhinu Road, RDI Greenhithe, Auckland, New Zealand.

Ray King, Treasurer
MCC Church Extension
Auckland, New Zealand

Fire Destroys Meeting Place of M.C.C. Baltimore

Dorian Ford

St. John's United Methodist Church, meeting place of MCC Baltimore; during the December 16th fire.

On the evening of Wednesday, December 16, Metropolitan Community Church of Baltimore became the 11th congregation of the UFMCC to lose its meeting place to fire. MCC Baltimore was renting meeting and office space from St. John's United Methodist Church.

The fire, which did extensive damage to the historic structure was reported at 10:24 P.M. Its origin was apparently in an office rented by MCC Baltimore. Firefighters worked for over two hours to contain the blaze. At one stage of the operation, 135 persons and 40 pieces of equipment were at the scene and a nearby apartment building was evacuated as a precautionary measure. The fire was declared under control at 12:58 Thursday morning.

The financial loss to St. John's United Methodist Church was estimated at $1,250,000 dollars. Metropolitan Community Church of Baltimore kept most of its property and supplies on the premises of St. John's Church. Rev. Ronald Pannell, Pastor of the Baltimore congregation, described the loss incurred by MCC as total.

A meeting to discuss an interim location for MCC Baltimore, and the Church's future plans was held Thursday evening in Rev. Pannell's home. Rev. Pannell was able to inform the approximately thirty people assembled that two members of the congregation had offered an after-hours club that they own as a temporary meeting place. Worship services were held there the following Sunday, December 20th. As of this writing, Metropolitan Community Church of Baltimore is still meeting in that location.

The cause of the fire is still undetermined. Fire Department officials at the scene, were inclined to view the fire as accidental, a possible cause being a space heater in the office used by MCC Baltimore. The manufacturers of the space heater are conducting tests to determine whether the heater could have malfunctioned in the manner suspected. The possibility of arson has not been eliminated; the Baltimore Church had been experiencing harassment and threats from local juveniles, the most recent instance occurring on the day of the fire.

It should be noted that Fire Department officials Nationwide have consistantly shown reluctance to attribute to other than accidental causes the fires which have devastated ten Metropolitan Community Churches in the past nine years. Even, as in the January 1973 fire which destroyed MCC Los Angeles, when the evidence pointed clearly to arson.

Metropolitan Community Church of Baltimore was founded in May of 1972. MCC Baltimore had met in St. John's United Methodist Church for a short period of time several years ago. The congregation had been using the facilities at St. John's for about eight months at the time of the fire.

The aftermath.

M.C.C. Baltimore After The Fire

K. Wickfield

I saw St. John's United Methodist Church burning on the 11:00 news Wednesday night, December 16, 1981. Standing there in my pajamas I looked around for my shoes and put them on - I had to go down there. I thought again - what could I do that the firefighters couldn't? I took my shoes off. But what if somebody down there needed me? Our church building burning? I couldn't convince myself even to call any of my friends to share the terrible news. The news went off and I crawled under the covers. I awoke the next morning to a telephone call that confirmed what I already knew.

We met Thursday night in Rev. Ron Pannel's apartment, about thirty members and friends of MCC Baltimore on every available chair and couch and most of the floor space in his livingroom. Rumors which had flown through the community were being shared in whispers. People laughed loudly and longer than necessary at any shred of humor we could manage.

The meeting began; we prayed and then Ron began to tell us of the day's events. His voice was warm and strong as he shared telegrams and telephone calls which had come from members of the fellowship, messages of hope and concern from all over the country. A prayer chain had been started for us. Fellow Christians cared about us. Through them, God was letting us know we were not alone.

Ron told us that in the early morning hours, almost before the fire was out, two women who are members of our congregation had offered us the use of their building in which to hold services. God had wasted no time. We would have a place to worship God together, all of us.

We made plans to publish a two-sided bulletin in place of our monthly Together magazine (the copy for January's issue, scheduled to go out that weekend, had been destroyed along with the media equipment). We decided to hold the Christmas pot luck dinner in the pastor's home - we would go caroling in the bars as we'd planned Saturday night.

The fire had destroyed the toys and food which we had collected for needy families in the area just a week before we were to distribute them. To replenish the supply, we decided to take up collections in each bar after our caroling so that we could fulfill our obligation to those families.

The Rev. Ron Pannell preparing for service in MCC Baltimore's temporary meeting place.

As the meeting continued, it became clear that although a building had burned and most of our possessions had been lost, the church was untouched. I left feeling incredibly reassured; I think we all did.

The publication went out on schedule: the community knew almost immediately that we were alive and well and where we'd be holding services Sunday evening. The Christmas pot luck dinner drew the largest crowd we'd had in months and Saturday night we sang Christmas carols just as we'd planned. Patrons of the bars donated well over a hundred dollars to the Deacons' Fund, enough for ten baskets of food for the hungry and toys for the children.

Sunday evening found us a little crowded but very much together on the first floor of 525 North Howard Street. The pastor of St. John's stopped by before the service to wish us well and to accept our offer to help his congregation in salvaging and restoring what they could. Members and friends of our church had rescued our altar and hymnbooks; others had borrowed and set up folding chairs; communion ware had been loaned to us. There we were, our voices united in song, our hearts united in the feeling of being a family. We joined hands to sing the Lord's Prayer - by the "Amen" our clasped hands were raised toward heaven and God was very, very close.

And so MCC Baltimore continues to be blessed by God, blessed in the love of each other and our community and blessed in the support of the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches. We are the children of God and our work will go on.

Photographs courtesy of The Baltimore Sun.

Top of page 6 *J. Pat Carter*

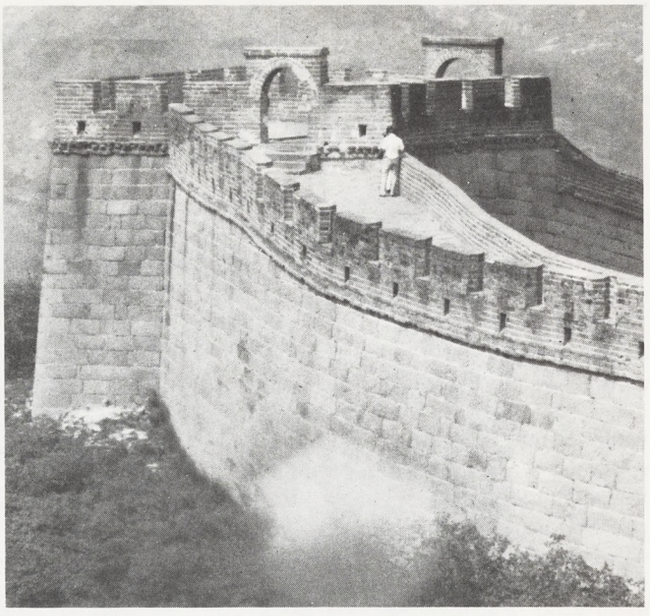
Bottom of page 6 *Richard Childress*

Top of page 7 *Jed Kirschbaum*

CHINA TODAY:

a personal memoir

by CHET SNOW



The Great Wall of China.

Imagine a city of five million people with just two Christian churches legally open for public worship. And whose second church was only reopened in 1979 after a decade of persecution. Imagine a country where in order to attend worship regularly, receive hospital visits from one's pastor, or arrange a religious funeral service you must be officially registered with the government as a Christian! Imagine a church with over 2,000 people at many services but only a dozen hymnals and complete Bibles available. Imagine a church where everyone knows that an assistant pastor is really a member of the government's secret police; where the official translation of the Bible censors passages considered incompatible with the ruling ideology and which stresses the socialist or communalist ideas in the teachings of Jesus.

If you haven't guessed already, the country is the People's Republic of China and the city is Canton (Guangzhou according to modern Chinese spelling).

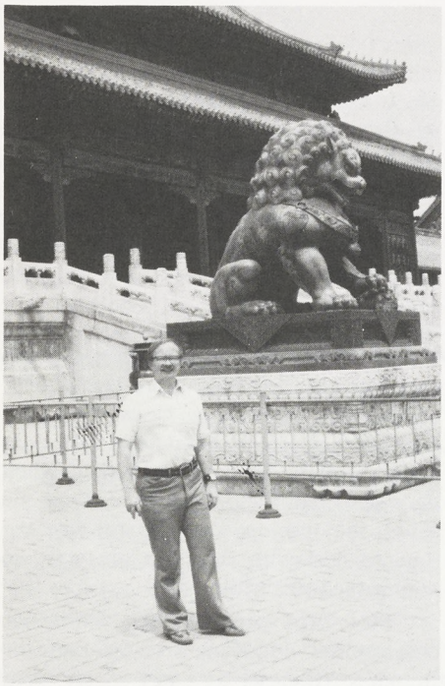
I had the unique opportunity to visit China in July, 1981, spending four days in Canton and a week in Peking (Beijing). It was a fabulous and eye-opening journey. I found the Chinese people to be engaging, friendly and very interested in knowing more about the United States. I discovered a rich culture and history which stretches back 4,000 years and whose vestiges are now once again publically acknowledged and displayed for citizen and foreign tourist alike. My hike up and along a portion of the Great Wall of China north of Peking awed and inspired me. It is, as some may have read, the only human-made object visible to astronauts in space. Other visits to a peasant commune hospital and a ceramic factory spoke volumes of what material progress has been accomplished in this still-developing country and also of the long, long road ahead before a standard of living approaching ours can be achieved. And everywhere I went, I discovered Chinese hospitality. "Don't worry; we will take care of you!" should be China's tourist motto. I constantly met Chinese attempts to anticipate and, where possible, satisfy my needs and curiosity. And yet, as one instructive encounter revealed, discipleship to our Lord and Savior remains a risky and sometimes costly venture in this beautiful, but often contradictory, land.

My Canton visit was with a package tour arranged in Hong Kong. Our English-speaking group of 35 included people from 10 different nations. At our last dinner together I happened to sit next to an elderly American man whose manifestly poor health had kept him from several of our group excursions. But, as I paused silently before the meal to pray, I felt his attention on me. "Are you, by any chance, a Christian?" he asked. "Yes, I try to be one, "I replied. His whole manner changed; years fell from his face. In a confidential tone he revealed to me the true reason for his being on this tour - the fifth such group he'd joined in the last three years! "I'm a smuggler, you know," he said softly, with just a hint of a twinkle in his voice. Dense me, I returned a blank look of miscomprehension. "Yes, I had over 50 Bibles printed in Chinese in my luggage. I've brought in over 200 of them to the churches here in Canton and in Shanghai in the past 15 months. They desperately need them, you understand. Despite its membership of over 2,000, the Protestant church reopened here in 1979 with only a dozen complete Bibles and hymnals. And the government won't let them buy any abroad. It has been pushing its own translation which omits passages considered too radical or anti-communist and which stresses those ideas of Jesus considered as socialist or Marxist."

"But how do you distribute them? And weren't you afraid of getting caught?"

"Well, until 1948 I lived in Shanghai and so I have many Chinese Christian friends. There are two Christian churches in China today: the officially-recognized church which is real and alive although somewhat infiltrated by the police, and the underground church which is made up of believers who worship secretly and who don't register with the state as Christians. Many of them and their families remained Christians after 1949 and somehow escaped the persecutions of the 1950's and Cultural Revolution period (1966-78). On this trip I met with a pastor who has just been released from jail after 10 years in prison. My poor health gives me an excellent excuse to avoid the guided tours around the city and with the current liberalization I can get out of the hotel easily enough after the tour group has gone. I usually take a taxi to some public place and there meet my friends or contacts. I've even taken some back to the hotel later to pick up

the Bibles. As for getting caught, I never worry about it for I know that God is with me in what I'm doing. I must tell you, however, that on this trip I did witness a miracle! I doubt you noticed at the border customs check but this time, for the first time, a customs agent asked me to open my small suitcase and bag. (Usually they let tourists in groups pass without questioning them.) Of course I had the Bibles in it. The agent who asked me saw them, zipped the bag shut and told me to pass through the gate. At that moment I saw his superior officer approach. Had the bag remained open he would have had a clear view of its contents. Clearly I'd been dealing with a secret Christian or a sympathizer. He



The author in front of the Imperial Palace Museum.

probably would have liked to have one of the Bibles himself but when he saw his superior approaching, he hurried me out of there without further discussion. It was a miracle. I just distributed the last batch of 25 Bibles this afternoon to the freed pastor. He's trying to regroup his church but of course he's still almost constantly-watched and so must be very careful. It is still difficult and costly to be an unregistered Christian here."

This was, unfortunately, the only conversation I was able to have with my American Christian friend. During dinner he told me more about his previous trips and how he often would wear a necktie with "Jesus is Lord" printed on it in English and Chinese. Often hotel employees and even one tour guide sought him out in his room at night or when no one else was around to ask for Bibles or to send a letter abroad. He'd left his necktie at home on this trip, possibly due to a need for more discretion in meeting his pastor friend. Nevertheless, the encounter revealed more to me about conditions for Christians in modern China than I would have ever learned as an ordinary tourist.

A second unique experience of my trip to China this summer was the opportunity to see Peking (Beijing) "on my own," without a tour group. This resulted from my obtaining a special invitation to visit a US Diplomat stationed there. Once in Peking my friend arranged an inexpensive hotel room for me in a Chinese hotel. I communicated by written notes from my friend and by hand signals and a small phrase book. My friend had to work, thus leaving me to see the city by myself. To my surprise I found that there are many Chinese young people (18-30) who actively look for the rare foreign tourist travelling alone. They really enjoy the chance to meet Americans and to accompany them so that they can practice their English. Speaking English correctly has become an important ingredient for success in today's China due to the government's desire to get foreign contracts to modernize the nation's industries and agriculture. In status-conscious China, someone who speaks good English and works for a foreign corporation ranks high indeed. So I never lacked for translators and "tour guides" while visiting the major sights of the capital. One Chinese young man spent an entire day with me, showing me through the Imperial Palace (Forbidden City) and the Chinese History Museum, and explaining how to use the bus system. In return, I took him as my guest to the International Club (for foreigners only) and bought him a small bookbag ($2.50) in the foreign exchange shop.

Two topics: religion and sex were both harder to discuss with my Chinese acquaintences than either history or politics. Religious feeling remains foreign to most young Chinese; few under 40 have any real knowledge of Buddhism or Confuscionism, let alone Christianity. Christianity retains its foreign-missionary stigma as well as being un-Communist. There was some curiosity about meeting a Christian American who obviously wasn't a missionary and seemingly not a "foreign, bourgeois, imperialist" businessperson either, but it was only momentary and then the conversation would be turned to other topics. Chinese young people know that there are now a few Christian churches open in the major cities. One man told me he had attended a service once, "to see what it was like." I met no professed Chinese Christians in Peking and I left on a Sunday, thereby precluding attending worship there (which would have been in Chinese and thus incomprehensible anyway).

Sex, and especially homosexuality, was even more difficult to discuss with what were, after all, really total strangers. The one young man I spent the most time with told me that, in accordance with government policy, even heterosexual relations are very rare before marriage which has been pushed back to age 28 to 30 for men and 24-25 for women. The state discourages more than one or two children through a variety of psychological and financial sanctions. Loss of free education and medical care for a third child is possibly the biggest one. Also, in communist China, virtually no young people live alone: they either stay with their parents and siblings or live in a communal-style situation such as the

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Chinese factory worker.

CHINA TODAY: A PERSONAL MEMOIR *By Chet Snow*

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army or a factory group, both of which have barracks-style dorms and sexual separation. Since there are almost no private automobiles in China, there is no "dating" as we know it. Love does continue to blossom, however, but premarital sex is the rare exception rather than the rule. Chinese families also remain very tradition-conscious and in most cases the parents have a big say in marriage arrangements. My friend, who was 27 and who lived with his brother in his parents' four-room apartment, bemoaned the fact that his girlfriend's father didn't approve of him - "too liberal-thinking," and therefore they might not be able to get married as he obviously wished.

Homosexuality is simply denied by government and family in China. The two times I mentioned it to young Chinese men, they expressed the opinion that such things probably did happen sometimes, but both denied any personal knowledge of anyone who had had a homosexual experience. Both men expressed a kind of disdain for homosexual acts, not the prudish moral disgust that conservatives in the West would mention, but a feeling that such actions are foreign to them and to the kind of people they associate with. China remains very puritan when it comes to the sexual revolution!! It lacks a Kinsey report or a Masters and Johnson team.

Nevertheless, longstanding "platonic" male-male and female-female bonding is approved and is very evident. Many same-sex couples, especially teenagers, hold hands or hug in public with no reaction from passerbys. This seems a natural outgrowth of the late-marriage and communal lifestyle of most Chinese youth. My Chinese acquaintences were surprised when I pointed out that this had some connection to what we know as homosexuality. They denied vigorously that there was any sexual affinity involved in these friendships, many of which last for life after the participants are happily married.

To sum it up, modern-day China proved a fascinating, wonderous place to visit. The people, when approached on a one-to-one basis, were extremely friendly and helpful. Their standard of living remains 40 to 50 years behind ours but people seemed happy with what they had and had high hopes for a more prosperous future. Virtually all expressed their approval of the current liberal trends and "opening to the West" and all said they enjoyed the spontaneity and friendliness of the Americans they had met. The sights were fabulous and once past the official barriers, travel was easy. I loved my stay in China and surely hope to be able to return some day and see more of that interesting and beautiful country.

-- *Chet Snow is a professional historian. He is Editor and a member of the Board of Directors of the San Francisco-based Institute for Historical Study. Chet has been a member of UFMCC since 1974, and currently serves as Clerk of MCC of the Redwoods in Marin County, California.*

MCC DETROIT VISITS SCOTLAND

Metropolitan Community Churches in Scotland? Aye, unco'quid! (Yes, and very good!) With an understanding that the phrase "The 80's Are Ours" means all of us, MCCD has a new approach to World Church Extension. Along with the miles of bawbees (half-pennies) five folks from the Detroit church left August 21st to visit MCC London, participated in the British Gay Lesbian Festival in Durham, and travelled about Scotland looking for the future Scottish congregations.

Scotland, including the inland waters, is slightly smaller than South Carolina (USA), but a real treat in terms of varying geographical beauty. The highest peak in Scotland, Ben Nevis (4,406 ft.) was the site of one of the walks of the Detroit group.

Approximately 6 million people live in Scotland, which allows for several potential MCC's. The "other Scottish nations", Scots who live in foreign countries, number well over 4 times that amount according to National Geographic. The Rev. Brenda Cisneros-Hunt, a member of the clan Gunn, is a part of the "other Scottish nations". Rev. Cisneros-Hunt traveled with another Scot - June Robertson of clan Donnachaidh, Ric Beattie (affectionately known as Mic), Anne Lewis - MCCD Community Outreach Chair and Barb Lafayette, (yes, the French and the Scots have long been allies).

Funds for the pastor's travel were raised by the congregation and friends in the community.

TORONTO MCC INVITED TO JOIN INTER-CHURCH COUNCIL

On Thursday 19th November 1981, the Bloor-Spadina Inter-Church Council approved the membership application of MCC Toronto by a 7-0-1 vote. All of the Anglican, United Churches of Canada and Roman Catholic churches as well as the Society of Friends (Quaker) supported that application. The Baptists abstained. Their pastor, however, made a point of explaining to Rev. Hawkes after the meeting that that church abstained only because the item came up at their last meeting very late at night, and with their budget still to be dealt with (and when they saw that they were divided on the issue), they decided they did not have the time to deal with the issue properly, so they agreed to abstain.

The 7-0-1 vote is very impressive because the consitution states that the churches themselves, not just their representatives, must decide on membership applications. It also requires a 2/3 vote to accept new members. Rev. Hawkes said, "We knew we had five postitive votes. We had heard that three others were being negative and that the ninth vote would be absent. We put our faith to work and talked to those involved, praying for a positive outcome. We had spent the last eleven months working with the council as an active non-member participant. Following the vote, in a surprise action, I was appointed chairperson of the committee to plan for the Week of Christian Unity, January 17-24. We celebrate and give thanks for the coming opportunities to worship, work and fellowship with our sisters and brothers from these other branches of the Body of Christ."

PORTLAND PASTORAL ADVANCE

At our most recent general conference, the concerns committee of C.C.C.C. encouraged clergy to set up good, local experiences for themselves in order to develop support among one another, a spirit of cooperative ministry and a sense of shared mission. Taking our lead from the clergy in the San Francisco bay area, who meet monthly for lunch, support and sharing, brother and sister clergy, student clergy and those seriously considering professional ministry within our fellowship, gathered at Metropolitan Community Church of Portland, Oregon for a weekend of pastoral advance, November 26, 27 & 28, 1981.

What is a Pastoral Advance? People gathering together in a central, geographic location for mutual support, worship and professional growth. The geographic areas represented most of the northern division of the Northwest District and the southern division of the Western Canadian District. The cities of Vancouver, B.C.; Olympia, Washington; Tacoma, Washington; Portland, Oregon; Salem, Oregon; and Eugene, Oregon were present, totalling 19 participants.

The program, at our first Pastoral Advance, presented by Dr. James VanCamp, a clinical psychologist in the Portland area, was titled, "The Pastor as Counselor". Our weekend began with an informal social gathering at the home of the Rev. James Glyer and Al Williams, on Thanksgiving Day night. The next day was filled with small group activities, worship and sharing. Many facets of the Pastor as counselor, included in Dr. VanCamp's presentation, covered theoretical, philosophical, theological and practical approaches to the ministry of pastoral counseling. Special time was set aside for small group sharing by the "significant others" of pastors, who often face unique issues in terms of personal growth and development.

During our closing evaluation and planning session, we reached consensus that what made the experience so valuable for us was foremost the content of the program, the cost (which was very manageable for even the poorest of our peers), the level of trust among us and the fellowship we shared. One of the ways we cut costs was to bring leftovers from our various church sponsored Thanksgiving Day dinners which were shared at a pot-luck during one of our evening meals.

Our next Pastoral Advance is scheduled for March 4, 5, & 6, 1982. It is our hope that this kind of gathering will strengthen our individual ministries by strengthening and affirming each other, placing emphasis on cooperative ministry rather than competitive ministry. The title for our next gathering is "The Pastor as Becoming" and will center attention more specifically on personal growth in order to facilitate professional development to our maximum potential as servants and do'ers of God's love.

For more information as to "how" we got it together, feel free to contact The Portland Pastoral Advance, c/o Rev. David M. Pelletier, 1236 Kincaid, Eugene, Oregon 97401.

STATEMENT OF FAITH

We believe:

1. In one triune God, omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient, of one substance and of three persons: God - our Parent-Creator; Jesus Christ the only begotten son of God, God in flesh, human; and the Holy Spirit - God as our Sustainer.

2. That the Bible is the divinely inspired Word of God, showing forth God to every person through the law and the prophets, and finally, completely and ultimately on earth in the being of Jesus Christ.

3. That Jesus . . . the Christ . . . historically recorded as living some 2,000 years before this writing, is God incarnate, of human birth, fully God and fully human, and that by being one with God, Jesus has demonstrated once and forever that all people are likewise Children of God, being spiritually made in God's image.

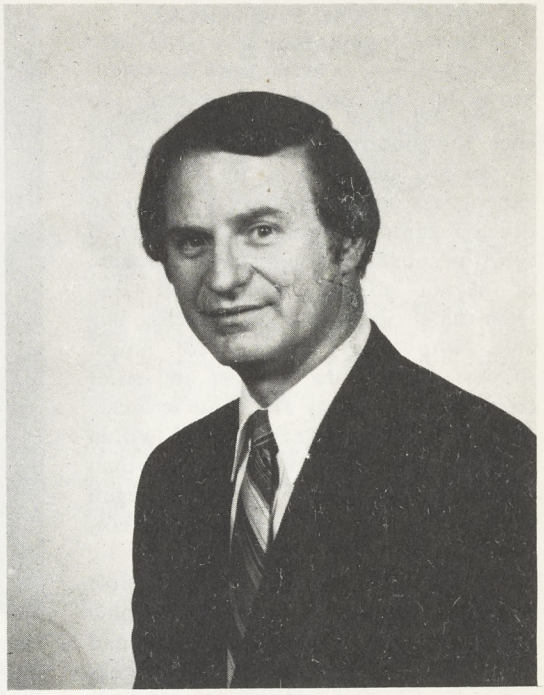
4. That the Holy Spirit is God making known God's love and interest to all people. The Holy Spirit is God, available to and working through all who are willing to place their welfare in God's keeping.

5. Every person is justified by Grace to God through faith in Jesus Christ.

6. We are saved from loneliness, despair and degradation through God's gift of grace, as was declared by our Saviour. Such grace is not earned, but is a pure gift from a God of pure love. We further commend the community of the faithful to a life of prayer; to seek genuine forgiveness for unkind, thoughtless and unloving acts; and to a committed life of Christian service.

7. The Church serves to bring all people to God through Christ. To this end, it shall arrange for regular services of worship, prayer, interpretation of the Scriptures, and edification through the teaching and preaching of the Word.

AGAPE M.C.C. FORT WORTH REPORTS PROGRESS



Rev. Jim Norwood

Agape MCC of Fort Worth, Texas, recently marked the second anniversary of their worship coordinator, Jim Norwood, and report that the song title, "The Blood Will Never Lose Its Power", has proven to be true. Rev. Norwood based his anniversary message on Numbers chapter thirteen which proclaims, "We can do it - let us go and possess the land that flows with milk and honey."

The anniversary was celebrated in Sunday Services in which the Rev. Elder Troy Perry preached, and at a buffet banquet given by the Board of Directors in the Grand Crystal Ballroom of the Hyatt Regency Hotel.

The Sunday services set new attendance records for the Church with a morning attendance of 100 and an evening attendance of 88. One new member was received, as in almost every Sunday morning service, and the tithes and offerings were over the budget. The record crowds were inspired and challenged by the sermons of Rev. Elder Pery, Founder and Moderator of the Board of Elders of the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches.

The buffet banquet was a lively and enjoyable occasion. The decorations were contributed and arranged by Oliver Heisler, a Board member, and his companion, Ed Ellis, who are display vice-presidents for a large local department store.

The Master of Ceremonies for the event was Clark Freisen, Assistant District Coordinator. Rev. Elder Perry was the featured speaker. Rev. Don Eastman brought the benediction.

A highlight of the evening was a solo by Rev. Delores Berry, District Coordinator of the Mid-Atlantic District. She brought the crowd to their feet with her rendition of "The Blood Will Never Lose Its Power". Other special music was provided by the Cornerstone Trio from the local congregation. This Trio recently recorded a record, and have performed in several churches in the District. One member of the group, Terry Faulkner, has recorded previously. He is the companion of Rev. Norwood. Other music was provided by Skip Fitch, Dareyl Brown, and Don Stokum.

A special moment of the evening was an announcement by Rev. Norwood of a contribution of 300 shares of Sedco Oil Stock to the Building Purchase Fund by a member of Dallas MCC. This contribution, worth $11,175.00, prompted a member of the Fort Worth church to jump to her feet and contribute another $1,000. These contributions brought the Fund to over $25,000. Another contribution was made by the President of Fort Worth Dignity, also in attendance, toward the purchase of a new vacuum cleaner. This was another example of the warm relationship in Fort Worth between Dignity and MCC.

Fort Worth had other things to celebrate that evening. In the last two years, they have grown from a membership of 11 to a current membership of 122. The average attendance in 1979 was 17, but the attendance per Sunday in 1981 averaged 119. Offering/income records have also increased from an average of $123 per week in 1979 to $562 per week in 1981. The average income per week in November, 1981 was $668!

Also during this time, extensive renovations have been completed on the building, new furniture and musical instruments have been purchased, and the church office has been given a new IBM typewriter. One member contributed 32 new choir robes. The list goes on and on.

In addition to increased contributions and renovations of the church building, there are many new and thriving programs which have been started. These include the Wednesday Evening Bible Study conducted by Student Clergy Larry Leutwyler, a counseling program directed by Southwestern Baptist Seminary graduate Darrell Vail, and a Visitation and Evangelism program established by charter member Nita Waldrop. Also, as evidence of the church's involvement in the Fort Worth community, Rev. Norwood was responsible for the establishment in 1981 of the Tarrant County Gay Alliance.

Reverend Jim Norwood attended Baylor University and graduated from Hardin-Simmons University in Abeline, Texas. He also holds a Bachelor of Divinity and Master of Divinity from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, and was granted an honorary Doctor of Laws degree by Burton College and Seminary in Colorado. He says, "Agape, Fort Worth, is alive and well and bursting at the seams. God has much in store for us 'Cowtown' folks as we continue to seek God's face and turn from our wicked ways. God has blessed us!"